AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

For the convenience of the Examiner, all claims have been presented whether or not an amendment has been made. The claims have been amended as follows:

1.   **(Currently Amended)**   A method for processing returned items of merchandise; comprising the steps of:

providing returns guidelines to a local return agent over a communications link, the returns guidelines for use by the local return agent in making a determination at a location remote from ~~a return~~ **any return** center as to the eligibility of an item for return, the local return agent authorized to make the determination on behalf of a merchant;

receiving an item remotely determined to be eligible for return at the return center;

accessing one or more return rules of the merchant associated with the item; and

processing the return in accordance with the return rules.

2.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the method is performed by a third party on behalf of the merchant.

3.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 2, wherein the method is performed for multiple merchants.

4.   **(Cancelled)**

5.   **(Original)**   The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of electronically delivering notice of the return to a merchant associated with the return.

6.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by determining a final destination of the return.

7.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by determining disposition of the return.

8.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the accessing step is performed via the Internet.

9.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by returning an ineligible return to the customer.

10.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by shipping the item to a location maintained by a merchant associated with the item.

11.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by assigning the item to an on-line auction.

12.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by shipping the item to a re-purchaser.

13.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of labeling the item for subsequent processing.

14.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the receiving step is performed by receiving the item from a carrier.

15.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the receiving step is performed by receiving the item directly from a customer.

16.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of inspecting the item at the returns center.

17.   **(Original)**   The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of consolidating items to be shipped to a common destination.

18.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of crediting an account associated with a customer associated with the return.

19.   (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of accessing transaction data associated with the item.

20.   (Currently Amended) A merchandise return system for use by a return center, comprising a computer system programmed to:

provide returns guidelines to a local return agent over a communications link, the returns guidelines for use by the local return agent in making a determination at a location remote from ~~a return~~ **any return** center as to the eligibility of an item for return, the local return agent authorized to make the determination on behalf of a merchant;

receive data identifying an item remotely determined to be eligible for return received at the return center;

access one or more return rules of a merchant associated with the item; and

provide information for processing the return in accordance with the return rules.

21.   (Original) The system of Claim 20, wherein the system is at least in part implemented by a network that communicates with the return center via the Internet.

22.   (Currently Amended) A computer product for facilitating merchandise returns, the computer product having instructions for:

providing returns guidelines to a local return agent over a communications link, the returns guidelines for use by the local return agent in making a determination at a location remote from ~~a return~~ **any return** center as to the eligibility of an item for return, the local return agent authorized to make the determination on behalf of a merchant;

receiving data identifying an item remotely determined to be eligible for return received at the return center;

accessing one or more return rules of a merchant associated with the item; and

providing information for processing the return in accordance with the return rules.

23.   (Original) The computer product of Claim 22, wherein at least one of the steps is performed via the Internet.